

State of the  
Historic  
Environment  
Report

**2002**

England has one of the richest cultural landscapes in the world. It is an incomparable asset. It is valuable in its own right, provides the context and setting for our lives and delivers many wider social, economic and environmental benefits. It is key to urban regeneration and important in achieving a sustainable countryside. It is essential to our future, and, like any environmental capital, we squander it at our peril.

The historic environment is always subject to change. This is not a matter for regret, since without change there would be no history. But change needs to be managed intelligently. Things that people value should not be thrown away thoughtlessly, through ignorance or for short-term gain. And intelligent change requires information. At whatever level – an individual building, a city or a region, or the country as a whole – we need to understand the nature of what exists and to evaluate its significance. Policy needs to be based on evidence. We need to start with an audit.

So we were very pleased when the Government commissioned us to co-ordinate this report on behalf of the sector. It is the first ever national audit of the state of the historic environment. As such, of course, it is a starting point rather than a conclusion. It does not pretend to provide all the answers. But it does demonstrate why the historic environment matters, and – its most important function – it will form the benchmark against which future success or failure will be measured.

**Sir Neil Cossons**  
Chairman, English Heritage

COVER:  
**A house on the Shaftesbury Estate, Battersea, London.**  
These attractive Victorian artisan houses make popular homes. Almost one in four dwellings in England today were built before 1919.

OPPOSITE:  
**Repair and re-use of the former St Margaret's Leper Hospital, Taunton.**  
These Grade II\* listed almshouses date from the early 16th century, were rebuilt in 1612. They had been empty and decaying for a number of years when the Somerset Building Preservation Trust initiated a project to convert them to social housing. The project was carried out in partnership with the Architectural Heritage Fund, Falcon Housing, English Heritage, the Housing Corporation, Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Wyvern Environmental Trust.

**People care about the historic environment** There is no part of England that has not been shaped by human activity over thousands of years. The historic environment is all around us, ubiquitous and inescapable. It consists of a multitude of places, each with its own character, history and significance, that are the common inheritance of everyone who lives in England.

OPPOSITE:  
Tideslow Rake near Castleton in the Peak District. This nineteenth-century rake is an outstanding example of the opencut working of lead veins and is of considerable archaeological, historical and ecological value. Few of the Peak District rakes survive in good condition but fortunately this example has been carefully managed for many years by the landowner. An ongoing initiative between English Heritage and the Peak District National Park Authority is aiming to reverse the decline in the survival and condition of rakes in the area.

Because the historic environment plays such an important part in everybody's lives, it is hardly surprising that people care deeply about it. People like living and working in places that have depth and resonance.

- Only 5% of people whose homes are listed say they would prefer to live in a new building. And this is not because only grand houses are listed: 47% of people who live in listed buildings are the professionals and senior managers in social classes A and B, but 44% are in classes C1, C2 and D.
- Rental values for listed office buildings rose by 6.5% in 2001 compared with 3.8% for unlisted offices. A five-year trend of higher rental growth demonstrates continuing tenant demand for listed offices.

Yet people realise that the historic environment consists of far more than traditional historic sites and buildings.

- Seventy-five per cent of people think that the best of our post-war buildings should be preserved, rising to 95% of the 16-24 age group. In a recent poll in Liverpool, 80% of residents agreed that it was important to think about preserving modern buildings for future generations.

History on TV is hugely popular. In 2001 there were 114 series and 68 single programmes on terrestrial TV on heritage issues. This is not nostalgia for a particular view of history. People take a broad view of the heritage.

- Fifty-eight per cent of people are interested in learning about other cultures.
- Three out of every four people in England believe that more should be done to recognise the contribution of black and Asian people to our heritage.

History is not an armchair hobby.

- Ninety-five per cent of people think that the historic environment is important because it gives them places to visit and things to do.
- In 2001, there were 57.7 million recorded visits to 983 leading historic visitor attractions, an average of 58,700 visits to each site. In addition, visits will have been made to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of smaller historic sites, and countless numbers of visits to historic towns and countryside.
- In 2001, the two National Archaeology Days attracted 60,000 visitors to 149 sites.
- During the weekend of the 2001 Heritage Open Days, an estimated 800,000 people took the opportunity to visit 1,831 properties outside London (up from 500,000 in 2000): this is more than twice the number of people who attended Premiership football matches on an average Saturday last season. 160,000 of the participants in Heritage Open Days were estimated to be first-time visitors: a new audience being reached. 799 local organisations were involved in making this happen, and 23,000 individual volunteers.

- In London, the equivalent Open House weekend attracted 360,000 visitors to 525 properties, up 25% on 2000.
- The Urban Parks Forum estimates that between 300 and 400 million visits are made annually to historic parks in the UK.

People are active participants. The strength of the voluntary movement is one of the characteristics of the historic environment sector in the United Kingdom.

- This year, the first national amenity society, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, is celebrating the 125th anniversary of its foundation by William Morris.
- Membership of environmental organisations has grown to eight and a half times the figure in 1971.
- As well as 2.9 million members, the National Trust has 40,000 active volunteers.
- There are now nearly 900 local amenity societies working with the Civic Trust, and over 500 archaeological and local history societies, conservation trusts and other bodies affiliated to the Council for British Archaeology.
- Communities across England have become involved in 350 Local Heritage Initiative projects since the Lottery-funded programme began in February 2000, investigating locally distinctive traditions and heritage.

**Economic Value** The historic environment enriches the quality of our lives. As a result, it is a major economic asset. In a global economy, it gives us a unique competitive advantage, and plays an essential part in delivering effective regeneration. It is also an irreplaceable resource, representing hundreds of years of human investment and environmental capital. It needs to be used productively, not wasted.

Tourism is one of England's most important industries. It represents 4.9% of GDP and generates 7.6% of employment. UK residents made 140 million trips to England in 2001 and spent £20bn. Overseas visitors made 19.3 million trips to England and spent £10bn. But without the historic environment, the UK's tourism industry would hardly exist.

- In 1996, 37% of overseas visitors mentioned visiting heritage sites as being of particular importance in influencing their decision to visit Britain; 29%, exploring historic towns or cities; 29% visiting museums, galleries and heritage centres; 18% watching the performing arts; and 16% visiting gardens. No other activity was mentioned by more than 10% of the sample.
- A 1995 survey showed that 54% of overseas visitors cited historic buildings as one of the things that encouraged them to visit London. It also showed that, even if they did not come to London specifically for the purpose, 79% of all overseas visitors visited a historic site while they were there.
- In 1998 there were 1,253 million day-visits to the English countryside – the wider historic environment – generating spending of £11.5 bn. Twenty-four per cent of all trips to the countryside in 2001 were to visit heritage sites, and 16% to visit museums or galleries.
- More than 16.4 million visits were made by overseas visitors to the top ten most visited English cities and towns in 2001, amounting to a total of more than 100 million nights.

- Overall, it has been estimated that 40% of employment in tourism depends directly on a high quality environment, rising to between 60% and 70% in rural areas.
- It has been calculated that 96% of visitor income goes to the benefit of the wider economy, and only 4% to the attraction itself.
- In the North East, the National Trust employs 244 full-time equivalent staff, and estimates that the visitor expenditure leveraged by its operations generates a further 1,260 jobs.

But the economic value of the historic environment is not all dependent, directly or indirectly, on tourism. Most towns and cities that want to attract inward investment do so by emphasising their history: with good reason, because it gives them an economic pedigree as well as the promise of an attractive environment.

Conservation-led regeneration is popular and it works.

- Investment in conservation areas delivers physical improvements and creates jobs. £10,000 of heritage investment in conservation area regeneration leverages £46,000 of match funding from private-sector and public sources. Together, this creates one new job, safeguards one job, improves one dwelling, improves 41m<sup>2</sup> of commercial floorspace and results in 103m<sup>2</sup> of environmental improvements.

Because of their popularity with tenants, listed office buildings achieve a better return for developers than unlisted buildings.

- In the last five years, listed office buildings achieved annualised rates of total return of 15.1%, 1.5 percentage points better than unlisted ones. Over the last 21 years, they have achieved a return of 9.7% per annum, compared with 9.4% for unlisted buildings.

Above all, we need to make best use of the economic, social and environmental capital invested in the historic environment. An empty building is an underused asset. Lack of maintenance is a failure to secure this investment. Unnecessary demolition is waste of irreplaceable resources.

- The embodied energy in the brickwork of a typical Victorian terraced house is the equivalent of over 30,000 litres of petrol – enough to power a modern fuel-efficient car for more than 250,000 miles, or ten times around the world.

More energy is used in demolition, and yet more in building a replacement. Many modern materials consume more energy in production than their traditional equivalents, and perform no better in use.

OPPOSITE:  
**The Anderton Boat Lift**  
Constructed in 1875, the Anderton Boat Lift has been repaired after a long period of disuse and is now fully operational again, restoring to navigation a key link between the Trent and Mersey Canal and the River Weaver, 15m below canal level. British Waterways led the £7m project with practical and financial support from English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and a wide range of partners including the Waterways Trust, the Inland Waterways Association, the Anderton Boat Lift Trust and the Friends of the Anderton Boat Lift. It is estimated that the refurbished lift will generate £1.1m additional spend in the area.

## **Managing Change** Maintaining and protecting the historic environment

is necessary to ensure that future generations are able to continue to enjoy the quality and variety of life we have today. Change is inevitable, but needs to be managed constructively. The value and significance of the historic environment needs to be identified, understood and communicated – not an easy task in a world of multiple values, where experts do not necessarily have all the answers.

OPPOSITE:  
**Isaac Lord Complex, Ipswich.** Dating back to the fifteenth century, this is of considerable significance as a major and complete group of historic industrial buildings which remain under one ownership. Through grant aid and advice, English Heritage has been working with the owner and Ipswich Borough Council to transform what were once buildings at risk and make an important contribution to the regeneration of Ipswich's historic waterfront.

Most of the responsibility for managing and maintaining the historic environment falls to the private and voluntary sectors. These are diverse, vulnerable in many different ways, and often poorly funded.

- **The Church of England has the largest estate of listed buildings (around 12,000), including all 42 of its cathedrals. Forty per cent of its listed buildings are in Grade I. They are all looked after by the voluntary effort of often small congregations, who raise an average of £47,000 a year to maintain them.**
- **More than 60% of registered parks and gardens are privately owned. Many form parts of small businesses, are expensive to maintain and will be vulnerable to any increasing burdens.**
- **There are more privately owned and managed historic houses and castles open to the public in England than there are in the care of the National Trust and English Heritage combined.**

- **Within Government, the Department with the greatest direct responsibility for listed buildings and scheduled monuments is the Ministry of Defence, followed by the Prison Service.**

Only a very small proportion of the historic environment is touched by formal regulation.

- **There are 4.7 million pre-1919 dwellings in England but fewer than 200,000 listed domestic buildings. 92% of those 200,000 owners of domestic listed buildings have never had an application for listed building consent turned down.**
- **Only 10% of all listed buildings – around 50,000 – are described as commercial or industrial buildings.**

Owners are crucial to the future of the historic environment. Managing change intelligently – building bridges between the past and the future – means creating an effective partnership between all the parties involved: owners, developers and regulators, national and local government, educators and academics, the voluntary sector and the communities whose environment is affected. Everyone involved needs to work towards a common language and a shared understanding of the issues.

**Children and the future** If, in the future, people's lives are going to be deepened and enriched by the historic environment, it will not be enough to ensure its physical survival: we also have to pass on to future generations our own knowledge and understanding, our enthusiasm and enjoyment.

- Ninety-eight per cent of the population think that all schoolchildren should be given the opportunity to find out about the historic environment.
- In a recent poll in Liverpool, respondents thought that heritage education in schools was, alongside physical regeneration, the top priority for funding.

There is good news to report.

- In 2001 there were an estimated 3 million educational visits to historic attractions in England compared with a school age population of 7 million.
- English Heritage gives free admission to schools, and around 500,000 of these educational visits were to English Heritage sites.

- The Historic Houses Association estimates that around 6% of their visitors are part of educational groups, and it is working with English Heritage to expand the educational services provided by its members.
- The National Trust attracts 600,000 school visits a year. These generate around £3m income that it uses to support its educational activities.

It is not only formal educational trips that are important. All visits by children to historic sites enable them to learn about the historic environment, even if it is in a less structured way. Children make up a quarter of the visitors to historic visitor attractions.

There is a need to encourage children from all communities to spend time learning about and visiting historic sites. Further research is needed to show the extent to which this is being achieved.

We currently have very little information on the scale of activities aimed at children outside formal education. The success of the Young Archaeologists' Club, which had some 3,000 members in 2001, demonstrates that there are ways of helping children develop their understanding of the wider historic environment beyond visiting historic attractions. More also needs to be done to maintain interest in the historic environment in older age groups through continuing education initiatives.

OPPOSITE:  
**Schoolchildren at Hadrian's Wall near Housesteads, Northumberland.** The pupils of Sherburn Village Primary School, County Durham, visit the area to learn about the Romans. The site is owned by the National Trust and cared for by English Heritage. The Wall was designated a World Heritage Site in 1987.

NEXT PAGE:  
**Whittington Castle near Oswestry** was in the news in early 2002 when a medieval garden was identified there. The castle is increasingly important as a tourist attraction, providing a welcome boost to the local economy. It is also an educational asset and a focus for community pride. A community-based charitable trust, the Whittington Castle Preservation Trust, has taken on the management of the site.

**Threats and Challenges** Change is essential if places are to live and prosper yet it needs to be managed intelligently, with imagination, care and foresight. Places die if change is mismanaged. The loss of valued places diminishes us all, and the most unnecessary losses, the most indefensible, result from ignorance. It should be a truism that the intelligent management of change requires information. This Report brings together in one place some of the data on which policy-makers can begin to base their decisions, and by doing so highlights that there are large gaps that still need to be filled.

People care about the quality of their environment but qualitative indicators are notoriously hard to find. Even some of the most urgent challenges facing the historic environment cannot currently be quantified:

- In many places, poor decisions and unregulated development – and the need to cope with increased traffic – are degrading the quality of the historic environment and eroding its significance. Some conservation areas have lost the special character that originally justified their designation, and some listed buildings and scheduled monuments no longer merit their protected status. How can we quantify the consequences in terms of quality of life?
- Insensitive new design blights the historic environment and diminishes its character and distinctiveness. What are the long-term social, economic and environmental costs of this loss of quality?
- Climate change is an acknowledged threat to both the natural and the historic environment. For example, changes in the intensity and frequency of storm events will pose a challenge to a wide spectrum of the historic environment from coastal sites to veteran trees. Can we measure the likely impact and cost the necessary mitigation?

- **If future generations are to benefit from the historic environment, to understand and enjoy it to the full, we need an indicator of the quality of educational provision as well as its scale.**
- **As well as total numbers, we need to know who participates in the historic environment, which communities and sectors of society continue to be excluded, and what the current barriers are to greater access and participation.**

For the next State of the Historic Environment Report we shall be looking at ways of mapping these trends, of identifying their impact and evaluating their social and economic consequences. This will feed into the co-ordinated approach to research that is already being developed across the sector. English Heritage is already assisting the Countryside Agency and other partners in developing a change in countryside character indicator. Meanwhile, the fact that some threats cannot be quantified and highlighted in this report does not mean that they can be neglected.

Some issues can already be identified as priorities for action. For example, there needs to be an effective planning system, adequately resourced with skilled staff who are knowledgeable about the historic environment and have access to the necessary information. Land-use planning is essential to the intelligent management of change. Local authorities need to be able to facilitate community involvement and advise and support owners and developers.

- **Recent research suggests that up to a third of planning applications have a conservation element, much more than previously thought, and yet local authorities employ on average fewer than two specialist conservation officers.**

OPPOSITE: **Redevelopment of the Whitefriars area of Canterbury** is the largest project of its kind in the city since the war and has required major archaeological investigations. The developers, local authority and English Heritage have worked closely together to ensure that this new mixed-use quarter relates sensitively to the City's historic fabric and to the needs of its people. English Heritage took the opportunity to use this for a citizenship project, working with primary schools looking at the future of their city.

**THE QUALITY OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT CAN BE ERODED BY INSENSITIVE, PIECEMEAL CHANGE AND DEMANDS RELATED TO TRAFFIC**

Signage and street furniture causing clutter in a conservation area in Victoria, London.



**WETLAND SITES, GENERALLY ENGLAND'S MOST VALUABLE AND BEST PRESERVED ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE, ARE RAPIDLY DISAPPEARING**

Richard Brunning, the only wetland archaeologist employed by a county council, standing beside an experimental reconstruction of the neolithic Sweet Track in a reedbed in Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve, Somerset.



- Local authority conservation resources have fallen in real terms by 8% between 1996 and 2000, with expenditure on specialist staff falling by 10% from £30m in 1996/97 to £27m in 1999/00.
- The effectiveness of statutory controls depends on enforcement. There is evidence that the rate of enforcement depends more on the resources available to local authorities than the scale of the problem they have to deal with. Local authorities served an average of 5.4 enforcement notices relating to historic building matters in 2001, varying from an average of 20.5 in London to an average of 0.4 in the North East.

We need to help the owners of historic buildings maximise the resources available for maintenance and improvements. Privately owned historic property, although it contributes greatly to the economy, does not enjoy the tax status available to charities or the Government funding that supports English Heritage. Private owners are not eligible for Lottery or European grants for building repairs or maintenance, while Britain is the only major European country that does not allow some form of relief against tax for the maintenance of historic properties open to the public. Bringing the UK into line with European practice on this would make a significant difference to the presentation of many of these properties.

- Some of the most interesting historic buildings are those that form an entity with their contents and surrounding landscape, yet 26% of capital repairs at historic houses are funded each year by sales of works of art. This can seriously damage the entity of which both the house and its collections form part.

The need to keep historic entities together, and to use legislation, particularly tax legislation, in ways that do not encourage dispersal, is likely to become an increasing issue in the future.



## HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS ARE PARTICULARLY AT RISK

People's park, Halifax, West Yorkshire. This Registered Grade II\* public park, dating from 1857, has been the subject of a major restoration project by the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, Calderdale Council and the West Central Halifax Partnership. Many historic public parks are in a declining condition and, on average, they receive less expenditure per hectare than non-historic ones.



## INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES CAN DAMAGE THE NATURAL AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Plough scars on a fourth century Roman mosaic in Dinnington, Somerset. The Government's current review of environmental farming schemes and wider reform proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy offer a chance to encourage more environmentally sensitive farming practices.

At present, VAT is chargeable on repairs to existing properties but not on the cost of new build, and provides a perverse incentive to neglect maintenance and make unnecessary alterations – both wasteful of real resources. It disproportionately penalises individual householders and voluntary groups who are unable to claim back the tax. A change to the VAT rules, which would need to be agreed at European level, would enable the same low rate of VAT to be charged on all building work. This would close a loophole that provides an opportunity for unscrupulous contractors to evade VAT and enable money that is currently spent on VAT to be used productively in maintaining buildings.

Maintaining and improving our historic buildings is not just a question of money. There is a serious skills shortage in the construction industry. This is a real threat.

- Many buildings (including 23.5% of the housing stock) were built before 1919 using traditional building techniques. Traditional building skills need to be retained if these buildings are to be kept in good repair.
- Research by the Heritage Lottery Fund has identified shortages of bricklayers, stonemasons, joiners and scaffolders as well the more specialist craft skills of thatchers, metalworkers and stained glass conservators. There is also a shortage of conservation architects, engineers, quantity surveyors and builders with specialist skills and experience.

Strengthening local authority capacity, retaining skills in the construction industry and releasing greater resources will help conserve the historic environment and manage change more constructively. This is an investment for the future with a guaranteed return.

We also need to protect some elements of the historic environment – archaeological sites, both on land and under the sea, historic parks and gardens and the wider historic landscape – from more immediate threats, many of which lie beyond the scope of the development control system.

In the case of parks and gardens, the risks arise from development pressures and a history of underinvestment.

- In 2001, 57 planning applications were made affecting every 100 Grade I and II\* historic parks and gardens, a figure much higher than for any other type of designated asset.

OPPOSITE:  
 A drystone wall and stone post in the Peak District. Hedges, walls, the shape and pattern of fields, the human-made distribution and type of woodland and heath, the settlement patterns and the tracks and roads – the whole historic fabric of the countryside is vulnerable to piecemeal loss. Modern-day equipment makes it all-too easy to remove such features, but, once lost, they cannot easily be re-created. Research in another National Park, the Yorkshire Dales, has confirmed that a large majority of the Park's 8 million visitors annually are attracted by its distinctive landscape of barns and walls. A programme to repair and maintain this valuable asset in the Park has safeguarded as many as 100 local jobs and helped to stem out-migration.

- 14.8% of Grade I and II\* Buildings at Risk are in registered historic parks and gardens.
- 21.9% of the listed buildings in Grade II registered historic public parks in local authority ownership are in poor condition. The problem is greatest where the contribution of good quality parks to the quality of life would be most valuable: in the most deprived areas, a lower percentage of historic parks is in good or improving condition, and a higher percentage is poor and declining.

The 1998 Monuments at Risk Survey showed that as well as monuments lost as a result of development, substantial additional losses had resulted from intensive agriculture, forestry, water abstraction and natural erosion. The Government's review of its agri-environment schemes and its determination to secure reform of the Common Agricultural Policy now offers a real chance to mitigate some of this damage. The England Rural Development Programme currently accounts for approximately 8% of the overall UK public expenditure on agriculture of over £3 billion a year, and this is likely to increase with the shift towards environmental management payments and away from production support. Meanwhile, many farmers and landowners have entered into management agreements with English Heritage in relation to scheduled monuments, an approach which has provided an effective and positive means of protecting them.

- Since 1945 the effect of agricultural policy has been to make arable farming the single biggest cause of loss of archaeological sites, responsible for 10% of all cases of monument destruction and 30% of cumulative damage.
- Thirty-two per cent of all archaeological field monuments were being damaged by arable cultivation in 1995. Three per cent of scheduled monuments were thought to be at high risk. More recent data from the East Midlands suggests that in 2001 13% of the Region's scheduled monuments were at high short-term risk.
- Work published in 2001 on Midland open field systems showed that ridge and furrow – until recently the characteristic post-enclosure landscape of many Midland counties – was rapidly disappearing. In a sample of 2,000 townships where ridge and furrow was once common, in 1999 only six still retained more than 40% of their ridge and furrow.
- At least 50% of original lowland peatland has been lost in the past 50 years, and erosion and desiccation has damaged or destroyed 13,000 wetland sites, generally England's most valuable and best preserved archaeological resource.

England has one of the longest coastlines in Europe and long historical associations with the sea, but its maritime archaeology is still not adequately recognised or protected.

- The National Monument Record Centre contains records of over 40,000 marine sites in English territorial waters, including 26,500 documented losses and 13,500 known wreck sites, seabed obstructions and isolated finds. This represents only a small percentage of the potential number of sites. So far, only 39 sites have been designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.

This is where we are today. Nobody need be unaware of the social and economic value of the historic environment. We can quantify many of its benefits, and we can pin down some of the most serious threats facing it. We know that change can be managed more intelligently than in the past. Policy can already be based on evidence.

Nevertheless this Report is only a starting point. We also know that new research is needed to refine policies even more effectively. Next year, we plan to present some of this additional evidence.

Our challenge – to national, regional and local government, and to the historic environment sector as a whole – can be summarised in two questions:

- **Has the value and significance of the historic environment been identified, understood and communicated?**
- **Is what is valuable and significant being sustained effectively for the future?**

In future years we shall report on how these challenges have been met.